

## The Art of Giving

Rotary is dedicated to the service to others and the changing of lives. In helping others the good will we spread will flow back to all of us. However we need to critically and honestly evaluate what we are doing in Rotary and why. You are part of a catalyst for change, however the change in others can only occur through their own efforts. Start with the mindset that this is not your project but rather it is their project. Words mean little, actions and sustainable results are what count. No one has a cookbook for success but past experiences and common sense give us valuable lessons to follow.

### Some general guideline to consider when planning a Rotary project

- Those who fail to plan, plan to fail. The first step in planning any project is to begin with common sense. Is this the correct project for this group of people? Do you have a good trust relationship with all parties? Look for partners with like ideas and work together and build relationships.
- Providing information and education to others is a key part of any project. Many people want to help but they simply don't know how or where to start.
- Active interest and participation by the beneficiaries of a project is absolutely mandatory before considering any cooperative effort.
- Except in an emergency and only for a limited time, giving should be a hand up, not just a hand out. Try not to do for others what they can or should do for themselves. A quick fix or prolonged handout may actually make the situation worse by encouraging dependency. "Above all, do no harm". The hope is to incentivize people to become more self-sufficient.
- The true way out of poverty is to teach people how to make, save, and use money properly.
- Measured results outweigh all good intentions. Inspiration is wonderful but without a sustainable, accountable, and relevant results it is only an idea with little value.
- Help people understand and visualize how they and their community can have a better life; give them hope. This hope and the building of relationships is often more important than the project itself.
- Service above self is admirable, but extreme self-sacrifice may not be helpful and sustainable either for one's self or for the beneficiaries. The goal is to bring your personal development and the development of others into a symbiotic relationship beneficial to both.
- It's appropriate to let people know what you are doing, not for their praise but to set an example for others to follow.

### **Some vetting questions to consider before embarking on a project.**

- a) Is there a Rotary Club in country willing to actively work with the community to oversee the project and act as the Host Club? Will they be engaged in the needs assessment, the planning, execution, and project follow through?
- b) Are there lead Host Rotarian volunteers and/or local champions willing to be the project managers who will oversee the project on the ground and coordinate with participating organizations if any, and will they actively report the progress and be accountable for the donations and costs throughout the project?
- c) Does the project address a significant need and will your contribution and involvement in the project greatly improve the standard of living for a significant number of persons in a sustainable manner?
- d) Does the host Rotary club and the local community have a significant financial, local supply, and/or work equity involvement in the project? Do they have significant “skin in the game”?
- e) Does the project fit the local culture? Does it use local supplies as much as possible, is it environmentally sensitive, and is it technologically manageable by the local community in a sustainable manner?
- f) Is there an exit plan such as a community council in the program where the responsibilities for sustainability are turned over to the beneficiary community?
- g) Are there plans to follow up with this community in the near future to assure the efforts have resulted in long term and sustainable change?
- h) Beyond helping with an immediate need through this project, do you see a future opportunity where your efforts could lead to other programs which would expand the development of this community?

### **Some red flags or warning signs suggesting that you should avoid a project.**

- a) Most basic infrastructure Rotary projects can or should be done in cooperation with organizations or government agencies, local or otherwise. Therefore consider if there is a social or political situation in the host county such that it would significantly threaten the success and sustainability of the project.
- b) Likewise is the local situation too unstable or actually dangerous for volunteers to assist with and/or monitor the project?
- c) Is this project more for the benefit of the provider of a service or a provider organization rather than for the needs of the people?
- d) Is this project just a hand out without really improving the situation of the people in a sustainable manner? Does it promote further dependency or self-reliance?
- e) What is the past history of donations to this organization, these people, or this cause? Have contributions been used wisely and actually improved the lives of the beneficiaries in a sustainable manner and incentivized them to improve their own lives and situation?

These are only a few fundamental guidelines and certainly you could add to these truisms from your own experiences. These concepts seem so obvious that they should be second nature to most Rotarians however these are the very issues that can spell success or failure for a project either in your community or internationally.